

Stigma: content analysis of the representation of people with personality disorder in the U.K. popular press, 2001-2012.

Abstract and key words

There is evidence that people with personality disorder are stigmatised within healthcare settings; however, little is known about the role that the media has played in the wider processes of stigmatisation. This research examines the degree to which the popular press in the United Kingdom have established a link between personality disorder and homicide, and the impact this may have had on the processes of stigmatisation. Using a content analysis approach, it was identified that there were 552 articles in the popular press, between 2001 and 2012, that made reference to personality disorder and 42% of those articles established a link with homicide. Comparison between two time periods, 2001-2006 and 2007-2012, identified that there was a significant reduction in the proportion of homicide articles (Pearson $\chi^2(5, n=552) = 5.64, p > .05$), however, the effect size of this change was only small. These findings suggest that the press may have contributed to the processes of stigmatisation, and may have encouraged the general public to hold prejudicial attitudes towards people with a diagnosis of personality disorder.

Keywords: Attitude, Discrimination (social), Mass Media, Personality Disorder, Stigma (social).

Introduction.

Personality disorder is a relatively common mental illness with community studies suggesting a global prevalence of 6-10% (Samuels, 2011). Within mental health services people with a diagnosis of personality disorder are relatively high users of services, with research indicating prevalence in outpatient services as high as 46% (Zimmerman, Rothschild, Chelminski, 2005). Whilst this means that mental health nurses will often provide treatment and care to this group there is evidence that they often feel ill equipped to do so (James & Cowman, 2007). Further, research suggests that some clinicians relate to the diagnosis, and consequently those diagnosed, with negative beliefs and attitudes (Newton-Howes et al., 2008). Understandably, this impacts on the quality of care received by some with a diagnosis of personality disorder who have described some staff as having prejudicial attitudes (Stalker, et al., 2005; Veysey, 2014) resulting in them being treated as a label (Castillo, 2003; Rogers & Dunne, 2011) and being excluded from services (Bonnington & Rose, 2014). In the context of high rates of childhood trauma and abuse (Battle et al., 2005) it has been suggested that these experiences in healthcare settings may mirror earlier negative experiences of neglect (Bowen, 2013). The impact of sub-optimal care is difficult to determine, however, this can be understood in the context of reduced life expectancy of 13 to 20 years for this group (Fok et al., 2012; Nordentoft et al., 2013).

There is a body of research about the presence and impact of stigmatisation towards people with mental illness (Thornicroft, 2006). Whilst there is a relatively well developed body of knowledge about the negative beliefs and attitudes of some clinicians towards people with a diagnosis of personality

disorder (Lewis & Appleby, 1988; Markham, 2003; Markham & Trower, 2003), there is little known about the wider sources of stigma that this group of people face. The media has been implicated in the processes of stigmatisation, and the role that they play in socialising the general public to understand mental illnesses and available treatments (Corrigan et al., 2005). This research will consider the manner in which an aspect of the newspaper media has represented personality disorder and consider the possible contribution this may make towards the stigmatisation of people with personality disorder.

Stigma.

The model of stigma was borne out of Goffman's seminal text: *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), in which he describes processes whereby the negative evaluation of one aspect of a person's identity, e.g. a diagnosis of a personality disorder, can lead to them being treated as if they are nothing more than a social stereotype. The contemporary view of stigma is that it consists of three components: an awareness of a *stereotypical belief*, e.g. that people with mental illness are violent (Angermeyer & Dietrich, 2006), has to be internalised, leading to *prejudicial attitudes* and affective responses such as anger or fear (Corrigan & Watson, 2002), resulting in *discriminatory behaviours* which limit life opportunities (Thornicroft, 2006).

The impact of stigma, as a reduction of life opportunities, can be understood as taking multiple forms. From reviewing the research in the field, and building on the work of Link and Phelan (2013), it is the author's contention

that this can be understood in three broad areas: people are treated differently as a result of the diagnosis, people anticipate being treated differently, and people negatively re-evaluate their self as a result of the diagnosis. Research suggests that stigma is enacted towards people with mental illness through a pattern of being treated differently which limits life opportunities, including employment (Brohan, Henderson, Little & Thornicroft, 2010), friendships (Webber et al., 2013) and healthcare (Van Nieuwenhuizen et al, 2013). The anticipation of being stigmatised as a result of having a diagnosis of mental illness also limits some people's life opportunities, for example through not seeking appropriate support from work (Brohan et al., 2012), or treatment (Clement et al., 2015). As well as having to manage the stress of not disclosing an important aspect of a person's identity for fear of not being accepted (Goffman, 1963). There is evidence of a process of people negatively re-evaluating their sense of self as a result of receiving a diagnosis of mental illness, often referred to as self-stigma (Corrigan & Rao, 2012). Research in this area has identified that whilst not all people with mental illness are affected by self-stigma (Thoits, 2011), those who are, are typically affected by lower mood and lower self-esteem (Drapalski et al, 2013; Rüsch et al., 2006). This can impact negatively on self-efficacy and people's beliefs about what they can expect from others and can achieve for themselves (Corrigan & Rao, 2012).

Background – representation of mental illness in the press.

The media's contribution towards the processes of stigmatisation is regarded as an example of structural stigma, reflecting the structural patterns in society that contribute to the stigmatisation of people with mental illness (Corrigan et al., 2005). Representations of mental illness in the press do not

themselves limit life opportunities; however, they can contribute to the people holding stigmatising beliefs and attitudes. There is evidence that for some people this impacts on their behaviour towards people with mental illness (Corrigan et al., 2013; McGinty et al., 2013) and for some people with a mental illness this impacts on their self-evaluation and self-limiting behaviour (Brohan et al., 2014).

There has been considerable research into the representation of mental illnesses in the press. One area of concern has been the degree to which newspaper reporting repeatedly links mental illness with violence and danger, and thereby contributes to a stereotypical belief that people with mental illness are dangerous (Bowen & Lovell, 2013). This has been found to be the case in Spain where 49% of articles linked mental illness with danger (Aragones et al., 2014), and in Bermuda where 39% of articles referred to dangerousness (Roberts et al., 2013). Similarly, in Romania where 38% of articles linked schizophrenia and dangerousness (Calo & Baban, 2013), and in Canada where the theme accounted for 40% of articles (Whitley & Berry, 2013). In three Eastern European countries where aggression was the dominant theme in 49.3% of articles in Croatia, in 40.1% of articles in Slovakia and 24.6% of articles in the Czech Republic (Nawkova et al., 2012). In the United States where the theme of dangerousness accounted for 39% of articles (Corrigan et al, 2005) and in Germany where 51% of articles about mental health disorders related to crime reporting (Angermeyer & Schulze, 2001).

In the U.K. the picture appears to be somewhat better. In Scotland 26% of articles linked mental illness with dangerousness (Knifton & Quinn, 2008) and

across the U.K. the category of danger to others accounted for 21% of articles in 1992, 23% of articles in 2000, and 14% of articles in 2008 (Goulden et al., 2011) and 2011 (Thornicroft et al., 2013). The latter research points to a general improvement in the U.K. press representation, between 1992 and 2011, which is in contrast with evidence of a consistent pattern in Canada (Whitley & Berry, 2013), and of deterioration in Bermuda (Roberts et al., 2013), during a similar time period. To date, no research has been identified that specifically focusses on the representation of people with a diagnosis of personality disorder in the press. Research by Goulden et al. (2011) did include a small number of articles about people with a diagnosis of personality disorder, within a wider study about the representation of mental illness. Their findings suggested that the representation of this clinical group has been predominantly characterised as bad news stories but the number of articles included in their research was too small to identify significant trends across time periods.

In the U.K. the red top tabloids (*The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Star*, *Sunday Mirror*, *People*, *News of the World*, *Daily Star Sunday*) are widely read with *The Sun* and the *Daily Mirror* being the most read and third most read daily national newspapers with daily readership figures of 7,007,000 and 2,995,000 respectively (National Readership Survey [N.R.S.], 2013). Research has suggested that the red top tabloids tend to produce small numbers of articles about mental health compared to both mid-range tabloids and broadsheets (Foster, 2006; Hallam, 2002). That has often meant that their contribution to the findings of data sets that include all newspaper types is small, and that conclusions from findings can often only be tentative (Foster, 2006; Hallam, 2002). The author is not aware of any research that has specifically explored the representation of mental illness in the red top tabloids, despite their high

readership and consequently their likely impact on a large proportion of the U.K. population.

Research Aim.

Informed by the research in the field it was decided to explore the extent to which the red top tabloids may have contributed to the stigmatisation of people with personality disorder, in the period 2001-2012. The decision to limit the enquiry to red top tabloids was taken as a response to the identified gap in our understanding of the contribution of this group of papers (Foster, 2006; Hallam, 2002). Homicide is a very strong and specific negative characteristic, so it was decided to explore the extent to which the popular press had forged a link between personality disorder and homicide through the repetitive representation of people with a diagnosis of personality disorder who have committed homicide. Evidence of a high proportion of articles that forged such as link could be understood as contributing to stigmatising beliefs that people with personality disorder are characterised by the threat of serious danger to others.

The decision was taken to study the period 2001-2012 as it was anticipated that in a 12 year period there would be sufficient numbers of articles produced to identify if there were patterns of change over time. The specific dates were informed by pragmatic reasons, as 2001 was the first year that all newspaper were available to the researchers. A stratified sampling approach was used to identify all available red top tabloid articles, rather than all newspaper articles in the UK, that made reference to personality disorder. The time period chosen represented a stratified sample of the true population of the red top tabloids

articles, which would have been all articles ever printed by this group of newspapers.

Research in the UK had indicated that there were significant differences in the representation of people with mental illness between different newspapers (Goulden et al., 2011). If there were similar differences between the red top newspapers this would impact on the degree to which the results could be viewed as representative of the sector as a whole. The research would test if these differences were significant. Research in the U.K. had indicated an improvement in the representation of mental illness in the press during the period studied (Goulden et al., 2011; Thornicroft et al., 2013), the research would test if there was evidence of a similar improvement in this group of newspapers' representation of personality disorder. This led to the construction of 2 hypotheses:

- H1. There will be a significant difference in the proportion of articles about personality disorder that are themed as homicide between the different red top tabloid newspapers.
- H2. There will be a significant decrease in the proportion of articles about people with personality disorder that are themed as homicide, in the red top tabloids, between the time periods 2001-2006 and 2007-2012.

Testing hypothesis 1 would be operationalised through a comparison of the proportion of homicide themed articles between the different newspapers. A significant difference would be identified through Pearson chi-squared test using

and an alpha threshold of .05 as an indicator of significance. Testing hypothesis 2 would be operationalised through a comparison of the articles in two time periods, 2001-2006 and 2007-2012. A significant reduction in the proportion of homicide articles from period one to period two, would be identified using Pearson chi-squared analysis, taking an alpha threshold of .05 as an indicator of significance.

Methods.

The data set was constructed through the use of the LexisNexis database which was able to provide full access to six of the seven national red top tabloid newspapers, the only paper that was not accessible was the *Daily Star Sunday*. The search terms: personality disorder/s/ed were used and all articles that used any of those three terms at any point in the article during the 12 year period were identified and copied into a word document. When newspapers repeated articles in second editions only articles in the first edition were included to mitigate against over-inflation of results, in total 552 articles were identified.

The method used to identify articles that linked personality disorder and homicide was content analysis, which has been used in a range of studies examining representation of mental health (Bowen & Lovell, 2013). Central to undertaking content analysis is the construction of a coding framework, prior to the exploration of the individual articles, used to identify which articles belong to which categories (Krippendorff, 2012). An important aspect of the validity of the coding framework is that it relates to the research in the field, and to a conceptual model that enables the findings to be meaningfully interpreted. The coding framework developed was used to identify which articles referred to

people with personality disorder as having committed homicide and which articles did not establish this link. This was informed by the research evidence of the high proportion of articles about mental illness that establish links with dangerousness, aggression and violence and the significance of the results were understood through the conceptual model of stigma.

Application of this coding approach meant that all articles would belong either to the homicide or the non-homicide category (i.e. the coding was exhaustive), and no article would belong to more than one category (i.e. the coding was mutually exclusive). These aspects of being exhaustive and mutually exclusive relate significantly to concepts of rigour in the research and correlate significantly with study outcome reliability (Krippendorff, 2012). To support confidence in the reliability of the study an 11% sample of the coded data set, selected randomly by identifying every 9th article across the time period, was coded by an independent coder who had received training in using the coding framework. The results were compared and analysed to identify the Kappa value to test the inter-rater reliability.

Results.

The content analysis identified that across the 12 year period 234 of the 552 articles in the data set linked personality disorder with homicide, representing 42% of the articles. Analysis of the independent coding of the sample, to determine inter-rater reliability, was undertaken with SPSS (IBM Corp v22, 2013) and produced a Kappa value of $k = .90$ which is regarded as an almost perfect degree of agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

The overall results could belie significant differences between the newspapers, which due to differences in readership numbers could be important in terms of the possible impact on the general public. Differences between the newspapers are represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Number and proportion of homicide themes articles produced by each newspaper.

Please insert Table 1 here

To explore these results further Pearson chi-squared analysis was undertaken, with SPSS (IBM Corp v22, 2013), to identify if there was a significant relationship between each newspaper and the proportion of homicide articles produced. An alpha threshold of .05 was taken as an indicator of significance and as there was a degree of freedom of $d.f = 5$, it was determined that a χ^2 value greater than 11.07 would be an indicator of significance (Fisher & Yates, 1963). The results of the test were $\chi^2(5, n=552) = 5.64, p > .05$ which suggests that H1 can be tentatively rejected and that there is no indication of a relationship between the proportion of homicide themed articles and the different newspapers.

The two time periods were compared with regards the proportion of articles that linked personality disorder and homicide, see table 2.

Table 2. Number and proportion of homicide articles in the two time periods.

Please insert Table 2 here.

The results of the analysis indicate that there was a decrease in the proportion of homicide articles in the second time period (37%) compared to the first (48%). To explore the results further a Pearson chi-square test was performed using SPSS (IBM Corp v22, 2013). With an alpha value of .05 as an indicator of significance and a degree of freedom of $d.f. = 1$ it was determined that a χ^2 value greater than 3.84 would be an indicator of significance (Fisher & Yates, 1965). Whilst statistical significance indicates the likelihood of a pattern occurring by chance it does not indicate the significance of the relationship in terms of the effect size. To determine the effect size of any possible correlation between time periods and proportion of homicide themed articles the Phi coefficient was also calculated, and a Phi value, ϕ , of 0.3 or greater was regarded as an indicator of a medium to large effect size (Field, 2013). The results of the analysis indicated that there was a statistically significant change in the reduction in the proportion of homicide articles, $\chi^2(1, n=552) = 7.38, p < .05, \phi = .12$; however, that the effect size was only small.

Discussion.

Community studies indicate that 4.4% of the population in England have a personality disorder (Coid et al., 2006), which equates to approximately 2.3 million adults in the U.K. (Office for National Statistics, 2012). Of those 2.3

million people only a very small proportion would, in their lifetime, commit homicide (Appleby et al., 2013). The results of the research indicated that over a 12 year period the red top tabloids linked personality disorder with homicide in 42% of articles. This could be understood as contributing to the processes of stigmatisation by encouraging a stereotypical belief that people with personality disorder are characterised by homicidal dangerousness. The results are strikingly different from findings more broadly in the U.K. press which had indicated that during this time period between 22% (Goulden et al., 2011) and 14% (Thornicroft et al., 2013) of articles had represented people with mental illness as a danger to others. The red top tabloid representation of personality disorder is closer to the representation of mental illness in the press that is seen in many other parts of the world which has typically identified a range between 38% and 51% of articles linked to danger, violence or crime (Angermeyer & Schulze, 2001; Aragonés et al., 2014; Calo & Baban, 2013; Corrigan et al, 2005; Nawkova et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 2013; Whitley & Berry, 2013). Further, the results indicate that this is typical of the sector as whole and does not reflect the approach of just one or two of the newspapers with high outputs. There was evidence of an improvement between the two periods with regards a reduction in the proportion of articles that were homicide themed, though the effect size of this change was small.

In consideration of these results they can be understood as possibly contributing to the three areas of limiting life opportunities as a result of the diagnosis because: people are treated differently, anticipate being treated differently, or negatively re-evaluate their self. Research into the general public's attitudes towards people with mental illness has revealed how strong the association is with violence (Angermeyer & Dietrich, 2006). The repetition in the

red top tabloids of linking people with a diagnosis of personality disorder with homicide in 42% of articles over a 12 year period could be powerful because it is congruent with many people's beliefs and because each instance is likely, at least temporarily, to increase the readers' fears, and wishes for social distancing (McGinty et al., 2013). At its most extreme these findings may be viewed in the context of the high level of violence experienced by people with mental illness (Clement et al., 2011). More typically they can be seen as contributing to the patterns of social distancing of family and friends (Webber et al., 2013).

Research by Brohan, (2014) into mental health service users' experiences of disclosure at the workplace highlighted the role of the media in increasing anticipatory stigma through, "perpetuating stereotypical images of people with mental health problems, particularly the idea that people with a mental health problem are violent or should be avoided" (p. 292). The repetition of articles, in the red top tabloids, about personality disorder and homicide can be understood as contributing to anticipatory stigma. This may impact on people with personality disorder adapting their behaviour through fear that the cost of disclosing to others their mental health status may outweigh the benefits, such as support from the workplace (Brohan et al., 2012), acceptance from others (Goffman, 1963) or receiving appropriate treatment (Clement et al., 2015).

Corrigan and Rao (2012) highlight that self-stigmatisation consists of 4 stages: awareness of stereotypical beliefs, agreement that those beliefs are accurate, application of this to understanding the self, and consequently harm to the self. The latter typically includes the negative impact on people's mood and self-esteem (Drapalski et al, 2013; Rüsch et al, 2006) and decisions about how

people engage with society (Corrigan & Rao, 2012), including decisions about seeking out appropriate treatment (Clement et al., 2015). Research by Rüsch et al. (2006) has indicated that some people with personality disorder are affected by self-stigmatisation, which has included validating discriminatory behaviour from others as acceptable. Link and Phelan (2006) note that self-stigma can contribute to a vicious cycle whereby the worry by people with mental illness that they will exhibit the feared stereotypes, makes interactions more awkward, which in turn can be interpreted by others as evidence of their disturbance and lead to enacted stigma through withdrawal or hostility.

Implications for practice.

There is evidence of stigma being enacted by some nurses towards people with personality disorder, including adopting social distancing strategies linked to the fear of aggression (Markham, 2003; Markham & Trower, 2003; Newton-Howes et al., 2008). Further research indicates that service users experience that as being reduced to a label and a stereotype of being dangerous and at times consequently being excluded from services (Bonnington & Rose, 2014; Castillo, 2003; Rogers & Dunne, 2011; Stalker et al., 2005; Veysey, 2014). The repetition in the red top tabloids of linking personality disorder with homicide may have contributed to this enactment of stigma in the clinical environment. The stereotypical image in the popular press may have resonance with stereotypical beliefs and prejudicial attitudes held by some nurses, and consequently contribute to reduced quality of care. Further, while the reduced life expectancy of people with personality disorder of between 13 and 22 years (Fok et al., 2012; Nordentoft et al., 2013) results from a complex range of factors, any diminution of the quality of care that results from enacted stigma may exacerbate this

health inequality. The results suggest that staff training into attitudes towards people with the diagnosis of personality disorder could include awareness of the role that the media may play in the perpetuation of negative beliefs and attitudes.

Attempts to address self-stigma have shown positive results with psycho-education approaches that supports people to explore their understanding of mental illness and how they can challenge some of the negative beliefs that they have assumed (Mittal, Sullivan, Chekuri, Allee & Corrigan, 2012). The results of this study suggest that including exploration of the role of the media's influence on attitudes could be integrated into such initiatives and that training for nurses to deliver these interventions could improve the quality of life of people with a diagnosis of personality disorder.

Limitations.

The use of statistical tests in social science research is relatively common but the absence of experimental, or quasi-experimental, design means that they are not being used to indicate the cause of any identified change (Robson, 2011). Their use in this context is limited to indicate a significant correlation in a pattern, in this instance between time periods and the proportion of homicide themed articles.

The sampling approach adopted was one of stratified sampling of a newspaper type, red top tabloids, and a selected time period of the true population of all articles ever produced by this group of newspapers. The use of

stratified sampling, rather than a randomised sampling process, is the most significant compromise of the reliability of the significance of the results. It is relatively common practice within content analysis to adopt this sampling approach (Hester & Douglas, 2007) and relatively common in content analysis of newspaper representations of mental illness (Goulden et al., 2011; Nawkova et al., 2012). Whilst this does compromise the reliability of the results, it does position them within the context of the research in the field.

There is an inevitable limitation that research into media representation does not provide an accurate picture of the extent to which their representation has impacted on the general public, though research (Corrigan et al., 2013; McGinty et al., 2013) supports the model that they do have an impact.

The method of analysis, content analysis, is limited to identifying the number of articles that contribute to pre-determined categories. It does not indicate other aspects of the communication, such as the type of language used, or underlying beliefs, which may also play an important part in how the general public are socialised into understanding personality disorder. This suggests the need for further research to explore the subtleties of the messages within the articles.

Conclusions.

This study is, to the author's knowledge, the first research to specifically explore the representation of people with personality disorder, and to specifically explore the representation of mental illness in red top tabloids in the UK. These

findings suggest that further research into the representation of personality disorder in the wider press would be a fruitful exploration of the wider sources of stigma that people with personality disorder experience. It also suggests that further research into the representations of mental illnesses in the popular tabloid press would provide an insight into the information and images that are received by a large proportion of the population.

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